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211008Z Mar 06

UNCLAS VIENNA 000840

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: INTERNET GOVERNANCE: GOA VIEWS ON TUNIS, INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM, AND INTENSIFIED CONTACT WITH THE USG

REF: 05 VIENNA 3594

1. (SBU) On March 18, Emboffs met with Christian Singer, Head of the Legal Services Department in the Ministry of Transportation and the GoA's Internet governance expert, to discuss next steps following the November 2005 Tunis World Summit on the Information Society. Singer said that Austria and the EU are content with the outcome in Tunis. In Singer's view, there is "no role for UN organizations to play" in implementing the Tunis recommendations. Singer stressed that further discussion on Internet governance should build on existing structures. Singer said that, unfortunately, some had focused exclusively on language in Article 68 of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society to justify "the special role of governments" in this area. According to Singer, Article 72, which emphasizes the importance of a multi-stakeholder dialogue is more important to the GoA. Singer underscored that no reasonable government wants national authorities to assume ICANN's technical function of managing the domain name system. However, the EU does advocate more transparency regarding the Internet's public policy principles.

2. (SBU) Concerning the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Singer maintained that the USG and EU positions were quite similar. However, Singer admitted that there is not yet a final EU position on the IGF and that there is still "lots of debate" within the EU on how to move forward on the IGF. The IGF should serve as a venue to exchange views and focus on "a limited number of issues." In this vein, Singer noted that the Austrian Presidency had issued a statement in February on behalf of the EU stressing the multi-stakeholder aspect of Article 72 and suggesting spam, security issues, and multilingualism as appropriate topics for IGF meetings in Athens, probably October 30-November 2. On "enhanced cooperation", Singer noted that the EU is waiting for the UN Secretary General to initiate the process. He added that

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Austria is "not in a hurry" to press forward with this and that the EU had no common position on how to proceed.

3. (SBU) Singer said that the Austrian Presidency wants to intensify discussions with the USG on Internet governance. He maintained that several newspaper articles in the run-up to Tunis had misrepresented the EU position. In Singer's opinion, more frequent contact would reduce the chance of misunderstandings and provide an opportunity to coordinate views. Singer said that the Commission and the incoming Finnish Presidency are interested in holding a U.S.-EU Internet governance troika. He added that other member states, such as the UK, also supported enhanced dialogue with the U.S. in a troika format. (Comment: We believe Singer implicitly suggested a troika format, so as to encourage USG coordination with like-minded member states prior to the Athens meetings. End Comment.)

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